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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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Z U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

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Subject: Toys to Fit the Tots. Information from Extension Specialists, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

What are you giving your three-year old niece this Christmas? And how about little Jimmy? Maybe he is only ten months old, but this is his first encounter with Santa and you want to give him something that'll make his Christmas even more wonderful. Getting toys to fit the tots has always been a problem to me. So this year, I had a talk with the parent education specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Extension Service. They gave me some suggestions you might like to hear to.

In the first place, you know, toys aren't just playthings parents use to keep children quiet with. They're tools. It's through toys that youngsters learn to do and build. They help develop natural abilities. For that reason, we want to be especially careful and consider the child's age, his strength and the things he likes before we make any selection.

A toy that's too advanced for a child may give him a feeling of inferiority. If he can't understand it, or can't enjoy playing with it and yet feels that he should, the toy is much worse for the child than nothing at all. Children like toys that put their hands, their bodies, their imaginations and their mind to work. As they grow older, they want playthings that call for or help develop skill. They like toys, not so much that do things, but toys they can do things with.

Sturdy toys are essential. After all, a broken plaything just stands for an unpleasant experience in a child's mind. So we want to select something that'll stand a lot of banging around and beating on.

For little folk, smooth surfaces, rounded edges and corners, good paint or no paint at all are points we want to watch for too. Even if the children are careful

and don't hurt themselves, parents will worry about toys that aren't absolutely safe.

Finally, a toy that can't be cleaned is 'bliged to end up a disappointment. Children want their possessions to be attractive. Parents want them to be attractive too. For that matter, cleanliness and neatness are points that parents demand more than their offsprings. But unless a toy can be washed or cleaned in some way, it'll undoubtedly finally become unhygenic.

So there are four general points we want to remember when we go to the toy shop. First, get something that suits the age, strength and abilities of the child. Be sure the toy is well built and can take everything the child can dish out to it. Third, try to select things that children couldn't possibly hurt themselves with. And finally, get a toy that can be cleaned without too much trouble.

Now....about that ten month old Jimmy. He's just beginning to learn to walk and talk. If you'll give him something to help him along, you'll give him something he'll like. Among the gift suggestions for a child up to about a year and a half old are small chairs...both straight and rockers. Be sure there's some bar, though, to keep the child from falling out of the rocker. Kiddy cars with rails are good. So are play yards. What's that you say? You don't want to spend that much on one child. You have quite a few to remember? Well...how about some round cornered blocks.... brightly colored. Large beads that can be strung in different ways. But one note on those beads. Be sure that once they're strung, they won't come undone easily. Balls appeal to most young children. This year, fabric balls stuffed with cotton are taking the place of rubber balls. While these fabric ones don't bounce, they're soft and bright and they offer the child an opportunity to exercise his muscles.

Children over a year and a half but under three always seem to be getting into things. There's a reason for that. They're curious. And they have so much to learn. They want to pull everything apart and examine it carefully. Here's where building toys come in. The peg boards, the blocks that fit together. Elementary puzzles. Crayons and outline pictures. Children this age seem to like rag dolls or

unbreakable ones. They like pails and shovels, express wagons, wooden trains. They probably start appreciating books soon too. But they won't appreciate them long unless you can get books made of cloth...or some material that won't tear the first time the child turns the page. They can be made at home. At this tender age, children need large toys, durable ones and simple.

Up until they're four, most youngsters play with the same sort of toy. But the older ones in the group can use things that call for greater muscular coordination. They can ride on tricycles. Of course, you can most likely find only second hand tricycles these days. But the children have reached the age to play on indoor and outdoor gyms and slides. And you should be able to find these that have been made in wood. This is a good age to start children with toy mops and brooms and brushes too.

When they get over four years old, there's some difference in what little girls and little boys like. Dolls become dear to a girl's heart -- dolls, doll clothes, doll furniture, dishes, laundry sets...anything that she can use to keep house just like mother does. Little boys like these, too, but may prefer trucks, trains, boats, lincoln logs and building blocks.

Just a word about what you'll find in the toy shops. The War Production Board and the Office of Price Administration tell us manufacturers are putting out more and better toys for Christmas sales this year.

For one thing, this year's toys are sturdier than those of last year. Most of them are made of wood or fabric rather than paper and cardboard. And while a wooden toy won't usually last as well as a metal one, it'll last much longer than paper playthings. You won't find many all-metal toys yet. But some of the wooden trucks and wagons and trains and other toys have metal parts on them. Many of the toys are made near war industries and contain the scrap materials from those plants.

If you compare last year's toys with the ones coming out now, you'll notice that we have fewer jeeps and tanks and guns. The war motor is giving way to a wide variety of other ideas. There are a lot of homemade and handmade toys for sale. Fabric dolls, handpainted chairs, chests, trucks and so on.

Games, the standby for older children's gifts are scarcer this year. A large part of the games being made now are being sent to the boys in the armed services for their off-duty moments.

All toys are under price ceilings. The general rule is that today's prices should be in line with the prices of March, 1942. The ceilings depend on quality of material in the toy and workmanship. Each toy you buy should have its price ceiling marked on it. So be sure to look for that before you buy. After all, if we pay over the price ceiling for a toy, we're doing a child more harm than good. If we buy inflation for him now, he'll have its disastrous results to face later on.



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